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THE Treaty of Versailles has been widely assailed in the post-War period, often by people who are by no means familiar with its terms or who have wilfully misrepresented its character. In particular German propagandists have claimed that Germany was induced to lay down her arms by an undertaking to make the settlement conform to certain agreed principles (President Wilson's celebrated 'Fourteen Points'), which the Treaty in fact violated or ignored. It is the object of this Pamphlet to examine this charge and to find out how far it can be justified, and at the same time to give a short account of the actual Treaty.

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The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was imposed by Germany on Russia in March 1918, and which is alluded to on pp. 4, 8 of this pamphlet, is the subject of Pamphlet 14 by Mr. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett.

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interested; of the actual terms of the settlement they were profoundly ignorant, and did not care to learn more. Hence, apart from the just observations of informed and intelligent criticism, there has arisen a legend of Versailles in popular circulation, which is sustained by important misconceptions and inadequate knowledge both of the actual content of the Treaty and of the situation with which it attempted to deal. The Treaty of Versailles has to-day become a scapegoat, laden with responsibility for all the evils from which the world is at present suffering. It is railed at from pulpit and platform by speakers whose words show little indication that they are familiar with the document which is the subject of their invective.

It is curious to reflect that the conception of the Treaty as an iniquitous act of oppression and perfidy seems to have found an earlier acceptance in England than even in Germany. Herr Hitler has drawn a memorable picture of the difficulties to which he was exposed as a critic of Versailles:

> 'At the very first sentence which contained a criticism of Versailles, one was met with the stereotyped interruption—"And Brest-Litovsk? Brest-Litovsk?" [Alluding, of course, to the treaty imposed by Germany on Russia in March 1918.] The crowd went on bellowing this again and again, until they gradually grew hoarse, or the speaker finally gave up the attempt to persuade them. One could beat one's head against the wall for despair of such a people. They would not hear or understand that Versailles was a shame and an outrage, or even that it meant an unheard-of robbery of our people.' (*Mein Kampf*, p. 519.)

adopted them with somewhat different motives, and expressed them with a differing emphasis.

Thus, in their authoritative declaration issued on 10 January 1917, they expressed in the first place 'their whole-hearted agreement with the proposal to create a league of nations which shall assure peace and justice throughout the world'; they required 'the restoration of Belgium, of Serbia and of Montenegro, with the compensations due to them', 'the liberation of Italians, Slavs, Roumanians, Czechs and Slovaks from foreign domination', and 'the restitution of provinces or territories formerly torn from the Allies by force or contrary to the wishes of the inhabitants' (Alsace-Lorraine); they went as far in the direction of proposing an independent Poland as their alliance with Russia at that date permitted; and above all they demanded 'the reorganisation of Europe, guaranteed by a stable settlement, based alike upon the principle of nationalities, on the right which all peoples, whether small or great, have to the enjoyment of full security and free economic development, and also upon territorial agreements and international arrangements so framed as to guarantee land and sea frontiers against unjust attacks'. At the same time, they disclaimed any 'intention to seek the extermination or the political extinction of the Germanic peoples'. If these aims are compared with those subsequently expressed in the Fourteen Points, they will be seen to be generally identical. The only difference was that these Allies were less wedded than was the American President to the rigid application of a single principle—nationality, and in this it may be claimed that they showed a

said, was induced to lay down her arms by a solemn undertaking to make the settlement conform to certain agreed principles and conditions, which the Treaty in fact violated or ignored. How far can such a charge be justified?

It may frankly be admitted that it is no answer to it to compare favourably what was done at Versailles with the terms which Germany, while still victorious, imposed upon some of her opponents. Nor is it relevant to point out that the military collapse of Germany was too complete to enable her to insist on any conditions whatever. Even though Versailles may shine in comparison with Brest-Litovsk, it is not thereby necessarily justified. Even though the Allies might have been in a position to exact unconditional surrender, the fact remains that they did not do so. It is unquestionable, and has never been disputed by any responsible person, that the Allies were under an obligation to make the German Treaty conform to the terms laid down by President Wilson in his address of 8 January 1918 (the Fourteen Points) and in his subsequent speeches.

The **Fourteen Points** as originally laid down were as follows:

One. Open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

Two. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas outside territorial waters alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

Three. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic

Eight. All French territory should be freed, and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

Nine. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

Ten. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

Eleven. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated, occupied territories restored, Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea, and the relations of the several Balkan States to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality, and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan States should be entered into.

Twelve. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

Thirteen. An independent Polish State should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

Fourteen. A general association of nations must be

agreement. The politician, particularly in the fluctuating circumstances of a great war, is necessarily alive to the dangers of committing himself irrevocably by his utterances. It is characteristic of his art to use language capable of various explanations. Legal or diplomatic draftsmanship, on the other hand, calls for a precision which leaves no doubt in the minds of the parties as to the nature and extent of their obligations. The two forms of expression stand at opposite poles. Any one who attempts to construe the Fourteen Points is at once confronted with a series of highly debatable questions.

Does the phrase 'open covenants of peace openly arrived at' exclude confidential negotiation? Is Germany, after signing the Peace Treaty, to be included in the category of 'nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance'? How far do the provisions of Point Three extend to nations outside that category? What is the criterion, and who is the judge, of the possibility referred to in the qualification 'so far as possible'? What is 'the lowest point consistent with domestic safety'? Is it fixed or variable? Does the phrase refer to internal policing only, or does it include defence against external aggression? Whose claims, and what colonies, are included in the expression 'colonial claims'? Does an 'open-minded and impartial adjustment' necessarily involve the presence of Germany during the inquiry? What is meant by the word 'restored' in relation to Belgium and to French occupied territory? What interpretation should be put on 'clearly recognizable lines of nationality' where such lines do not, in fact, exist?

framed with a view to the function which they were now called on to fulfil. To the principal document, the Fourteen Points, an authoritative guide was prepared, which was approved by Wilson himself. This has been described, by Mr. Winston Churchill, as 'certainly an accommodating document'. Be that as it may, it was presumably what the President had actually meant. Mr. Nicolson objects that it was never supplied to the Germans. To this it may be replied that it was prepared on 29 October, and authorized on the 30th, by which time the enemy, who had asked for no explanations, were already prepared to accept the Wilsonian speeches as a basis of peace. Mr. Charles Seymour, indeed, in his edition of Colonel House's papers, expresses the opinion that the vagueness in President Wilson's proposals 'may have attracted the enemy', since it 'made of them an admirable tool of propaganda but unfitted them for service in a peace programme'.

The German Approach

There may well be truth in this, but an even more probable reason for the German lack of curiosity seems to be that the points in which they were really interested were comparatively few. Any one who studies the wartime speeches of President Wilson must be struck by the fact that they are inspired by a dual purpose. While they contain on the one hand some concrete terms of peace, capable of incorporation in a treaty binding merely the Allies and particular opponents, they also include a large number of proposals conceived as the framework of a new world-order, which are of

ment of Point Four, but might also be justified as 'the destruction of arbitrary power', which was one of the declared ends of Wilsonian policy. Apart from the Fourteen Points, the other dicta, with their repeated emphasis on self-determination, forecast the loss of a few other portions of territory, such as Danish Slesvig, but, since Germany on the whole was racially homogeneous, this principle seemed in general more likely to help than to embarrass her.

On the other side of the account, direct annexation for the benefit of any particular victor Power appeared to be excluded, and there would be no general or punitive indemnity for the cost of the war. Beyond this, the highly idealistic spirit which pervaded all the speeches in question promised to operate in mitigation of undue harshness, or would at least supply ammunition for any necessary protest. In this respect, a request for further precision might well prove unwise, since Germany, at the date of the negotiations, was hardly in a position to refuse any terms that might be offered. On 1 October Ludendorff was already insistent on the dangers of further delay: 'To-day the troops are holding their own. What may happen to-morrow cannot be foreseen.' By the end of the month the situation was even more hopeless. Whatever the interpretation, it would have to be accepted, while to leave the matter vague would leave a possible grievance open. Above all, President Wilson was clearly more disinterested than any other opponent of Germany, and it was desirable that the inevitable settlement should be entrusted as far as possible to

but merely prohibited secret treaties. Point Two, relating to Freedom of the Seas, gave rise to considerably more difficulty, and there seemed at first a risk of insoluble deadlock between the British and American points of view. A British compromise was eventually adopted, which reserved complete freedom at the Conference upon the point, which was thus in practice eliminated from the conditions of peace. An even more fundamental modification was introduced, ostensibly as an interpretation of Points Seven and Eight, which provided that 'compensation will be made by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air'. These two modifications, the second of course being of tremendous importance, were duly communicated to the German Government, and by it accepted. The only further point of controversy related to Point Nine, and will be dealt with later, the objection being at the time overruled on the ground that it was irrelevant to the reply to *Germany*, which was then under consideration. The Fourteen Points, as modified, were then accepted as a basis.

Application of the Points: World-Order

We may now consider how this agreed basis was in fact disposed of in the Treaty of Versailles. The first four Points belong to the category world-order, and obviously could not, for the reasons already given, be fully implemented in the Treaty with Germany.

provision to secure and maintain freedom of communications and of transit and equitable treatment for the commerce of all Members of the League'. The section of the Treaty dealing with Ports, Waterways, and Railways (Part XII), and in particular the articles placing certain rivers under international administration (Articles 331–62), fall also under the head of the removal or reduction of economic barriers. It has to be observed, however, that Point Three was emphatically one of those proposals which would require general and protracted negotiations to carry into effect; it could not be at all adequately dealt with in a peace treaty with a single nation.

Moreover, it was not a point by the ignoring or violation of which Germany was aggrieved. According to the authorized commentary, this proposal amounted merely to 'the most-favoured-nation clause applying automatically to all members of the League of Nations'. Within this ring, it did not preclude tariffs which were undiscriminating, and outside it it precluded nothing. It might have been advantageous to confer in this way a privileged position upon League members, but it could only have operated to the detriment of Germany, so long as she was excluded from membership. The qualification 'so far as possible' should be noted.

4. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

Though this provision has not in fact been carried out, the Treaty of Versailles is altogether blameless in the matter. The necessity for it is recognized in

objection seems, however, to be superficial and unimportant. A judge may show extreme bias in a trial in which all the parties are fully represented; conversely, men frequently apply an open mind to questions where the representation of parties is, in the nature of things, impossible. In interpreting President Wilson's phrase, it should be borne in mind that he himself evidently did not think a natural bias of mind incompatible with impartial adjudication. Considerable light is shed upon his meaning by the first of the Five Particulars (speech of 27 September): 'The *impartial* justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those *to whom we do not wish to be just*.' The points upon which the Germans relied in claiming their colonies were in any case public property; they are, indeed, stated in the official American commentary to the Fourteen Points in almost exactly the same terms as were afterwards used by the German representatives in their observations on the Peace Treaty, 29 May 1919. In fact, these observations were heard and answered before the Treaty assumed its final form. We may feel that the Allies could quite simply have put themselves right with the world by the expedient of allowing Germany a voice in the decision, but it is clear that the impartiality of the adjustment would not in such circumstances have been any better guaranteed. The impartiality of the decision would still have been open to subsequent challenge. The first thought which strikes any one who can throw his mind back to the atmosphere of 1918—and one which must necessarily

in this case apply. The determination of the question was to be reached by weighing three elements in equal scales. These were the 'equitable claims' of Germany, based not on former ownership but on other considerations, the 'equitable claims' of various Allied and Associated Powers, from which mere right by conquest was correspondingly excluded, and the 'interests of the populations concerned'. It is rather significant, in view of President Wilson's general attitude, that in this instance the third class of claim was not to have a preponderant but merely an 'equal weight'. The idea seems to have been that it should be decisive only in the event of an approximate balance between conflicting claims of another description.

Were the 'equitable claims' of Germany and of the Allies respectively so nearly equal in fact as to give rise to difficulty? They are duly set out in the official commentary to the Fourteen Points, and may also be collected from the German observations on the Treaty, 29 May 1919, and from the Allied reply. Germany urged her right as a great nation to share in the colonial mission, her economic requirements, and the need for an outlet for her surplus population. The first point was merely a question of prestige. As regards the second, the percentage of raw material which Germany derived from her colonies was 0·5 of the total, and her exports were similarly negligible. To transfer the colonies to a different sovereignty need not in fact deprive her of these resources. In 1919 the question was not complicated by policies of autarky or foreign ex-

balanced, the question we have to ask from the standpoint of native interest is simply this, Was there so clear an advantage to the natives in the retention of German sovereignty as could justly turn the scale in her favour? We may freely acknowledge that the views entertained in 1918 on the subject of German colonial misrule were at any rate exaggerated: that is not the point. Can we say that German rule was likely to be so much better than the system devised by the Allies as to entitle Germany to claim a decision overriding the other elements in the case? This question admits of but one answer, and we are therefore justified in saying that the solution reached in the Treaty of Versailles was in fact on the lines which a 'free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment' should follow.

Actually, the decision to retain the German colonies was unanimously reached at the Peace Conference without discussion: the whole debate turned upon the third element in the problem, the 'interests of the populations concerned', and upon the alternatives of absolute sovereignty or trusteeship. The second alternative won the day. By Article 119 of the Treaty, the title to the German colonies was transferred to the Allied and Associated Powers as a body, and they proceeded to farm these territories out to mandatories in accordance with Article 22.

Russia

6. The evacuation of all Russian territory, and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and un-

French and Belgian territory were evacuated under the Armistice. Alsace-Lorraine was transferred to France by Section V of the Treaty. The only controversial question under this head arises from the Allied addendum, which purported to be an interpretation of the word 'restored' in Points Seven and Eight. It was no doubt a drastic modification of the original conditions, but was one which the Allies other than the U.S.A. were fully entitled to make before accepting them. It was the basis of the whole claim for reparation. There are few today who would defend the wisdom of the policy involved, and it is difficult to approve the ingenious argument of General Smuts, by which the Allies were persuaded to include the cost of pensions and separation allowances in the claim presented. Nor was it either necessary or wise to preface the reparation section of the Treaty with what became known as the 'War-Guilt Clause' (Article 231), which, rather freely interpreted or misinterpreted, afforded a favourite text for German propagandists.

It must be recognized, however, that this stipulation of 5 November, a duly accepted part of the bases of settlement, in fact provided the Allies with an unimpeachable claim for reparation to the limit of German capacity to pay. Even Mr. Keynes, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (p. 123, *1919*), a work designed as an attack upon the economic provisions of the Treaty, places the damage falling strictly within the terms of the agreed formula at a figure possibly as high as 3,000 million pounds. He believes that 'it would have been a wise and just act to have asked the German Government at the

from the standpoint of an equitable division of the receipts, there was much to be said.

Another important provision falling under the head of reparation or restoration was the transfer to France of the coal-mines of the Saar, which was stated to be made 'as compensation for the destruction of the coal-mines in the north of France and as part payment towards the total reparation due from Germany'. In order to facilitate the working of this arrangement, the government of this area was temporarily entrusted to an international commission under the League of Nations, with provision for a plebiscite in 1935 on the question of the final sovereignty of the region. In the event of its ultimate return to Germany, a right was reserved to that country to repurchase the mines. The plebiscite of 1935 resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of Germany.

Austria-Hungary and the Peace Terms

As already indicated, Points Nine to Twelve are not directly relevant to a discussion of the Treaty of Versailles. They concerned the other defeated Powers, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey. In view, however, of charges of violation, made especially in relation to Points Nine and Ten, a few words may be said on the matter.

Between the date of the speech in which the Fourteen Points were first enunciated and the commencement of negotiations for an armistice, the situation in south-eastern Europe had been profoundly modified. The Czechoslovaks had been recognized as belligerents, and the principle of a

that this objection was never articulately raised, it should be said that it was in the form of a carefully drafted observation in writing, quoted in *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, vol. iv, p. 178. It was, however, overruled on the ground that it was not relevant to the negotiations with *Germany*, which were then under consideration. There can be no doubt, however, of Italy's intention to press the point. A charge, therefore, of 'violation' of Points Nine or Ten cannot be accepted without important qualifications.

Poland

13. An independent Polish State should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

In spite of the grievances nursed by Germany in connexion with Danzig, Upper Silesia, and the intersection of the Reich by the Polish Corridor, it may be reasonably claimed that the conditions of Point Thirteen were most punctiliously observed in the Treaty of Versailles. Purely ethnographic considerations were in fact given almost excessive weight. The territory transferred from Germany to Poland was far less than Poland's representatives claimed, and confined to regions where the predominant population was indisputably Polish. In at least six places the proposals of the expert commission charged with recommending the frontier were overruled in favour of Germany by the Supreme Council of the Allies. From the stand-

it, owing to its proximity to the German frontier. Commercially and economically, it was nevertheless a Polish port, and if the 'free and secure access to the sea' promised by President Wilson was to be anything but illusory, its retention by Germany was out of the question. As Frederic the Great observed, 'He who holds the mouth of the Vistula and Danzig has greater power over Poland than the King in Warsaw'. Influenced by these considerations, the Commission in Paris therefore advised transfer to Poland. This solution was, however, rejected in the Treaty, which created Danzig a 'free city' under the administration of the League of Nations. The interpretation of Point Thirteen may thus be claimed to have been in all respects a peculiarly fair one.

The League of Nations

14. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike.

This Point of course contains the germ of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which constitutes the first twenty-six articles of the Treaty of Versailles, and in particular of Article 10, which was President Wilson's special contribution to the problem. By the irony of fate, it was this American contribution which led, more than anything else, to the rejection of the Covenant and the Treaty by the Senate of the United States, and the members of the League subsequently interpreted Article 10 in a way which deprived it of all practical effect.

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absurdity. Recent experience has demonstrated that a more strictly racial boundary was incompatible with the young State's independent existence. It must be remembered, too, that the clear-cut lines of nationality which Wilson assumed were non-existent in the confused medley of races with which the Peace Conference had to deal. With the best will in the world, an ideal solution was unattainable.

A few of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles are not adequately covered by the Fourteen Points, but can only be judged by reference to the principles laid down by President Wilson in later speeches which were included in the bases of peace: the Four Ends, the Four Principles, and the Five Particulars. Some of these have already been mentioned, and it has been remarked that these utterances were even more lacking in precision, and weakened by qualifications, than the original pronouncement which they supplemented. They involved, moreover, a good deal of repetition; they are not thirteen fresh points: for instance, the fifth of the Five Particulars is a paraphrase of No. 1 of the Fourteen Points, and the last of the Four Ends repeats and slightly elaborates the conception of the League of Nations expressed in Point Fourteen. Several of the remaining pronouncements express in varying phraseology the idea that territorial changes are to be based on self-determination, rather than the material interest or advantage of any particular nation or group. The third of the Five Particulars, forbidding 'leagues or alliances or special covenants and understandings within the

was undoubtedly German. The necessity of a port to an independent Lithuania made the case equitably analogous to that of Danzig. The problem would probably have been solved in the same way but for the violent action of the Lithuanians, who, while the permanent status of Memel was still under consideration, attacked the town in January 1923, compelled the surrender of its garrison, and set up a provisional Government. Responsibility for the régime eventually instituted does not lie with the Peace Treaty.

Article 80, forbidding an Austro-German union, 'except with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations', seems at first sight in conflict with the principle of national self-determination. It was felt, however, that to allow Germany to come out of the War with so large an accretion of territory would be an abuse of the principle, repugnant to 'essential justice', and a threat to permanent peace (Four Principles, I), besides being inconsistent with the destruction of Germany's arbitrary power. Discretion was reserved to the League of Nations to abolish the prohibition if circumstances justified such a course. Subsequent events have vindicated both the justice and the wisdom of the article. It is clear that the 'arbitrary power' of Germany could not be permanently destroyed or rendered impotent merely by a temporary change in her system of government. Of this, President Wilson himself was conscious. 'Germany', he said in the speech of the Five Particulars, 'will have to redeem her character not by what happens at the peace table but by what follows.' Every one can

The military occupation of the Rhineland for a period of fifteen years (Articles 428–32)—actually terminated in little more than ten—was technically justified as a guarantee for the due performance of the Treaty. It had no ostensible connexion with the compromise on the French claim.

Finally, the demand for the surrender and trial of the Kaiser and other alleged 'war-criminals' stands in a category by itself. It raises questions of individual rather than international concern. The conviction before tribunals of their own countrymen, at Leipzig in 1921, of a large proportion of the accused tends to vindicate the proposal from the standpoint of 'essential justice', though it may be otherwise difficult to place it within the framework of the pre-armistice agreement. But the motives which inspired so novel a stipulation were fundamentally idealistic—the notion that war is a crime and not a shield for crime shows progress in ethical conceptions. Perhaps the architects of the peace settlement here showed finer qualities of heart than of head. That criticism indeed, supplanting the opposite one which is current in popular legend, may possibly be the final verdict on the Treaty. For all its defects, it at least deserves the place in history assigned to it by Dr. Seton Watson as 'the first international settlement which its authors deliberately tried to erect upon definite ethical principles'.